

# THE TELEGRAPH WIRE

ISSUE 16

COMICS  
& CONIX

FREE!

## DALGODA



1984 Jan Strnad & Dennis Fujitake

## LOVE AND ROCKETS

### THIS ISSUE:

Interviews with the  
creators behind two of  
comics' really different  
magazines.

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BOOKS**



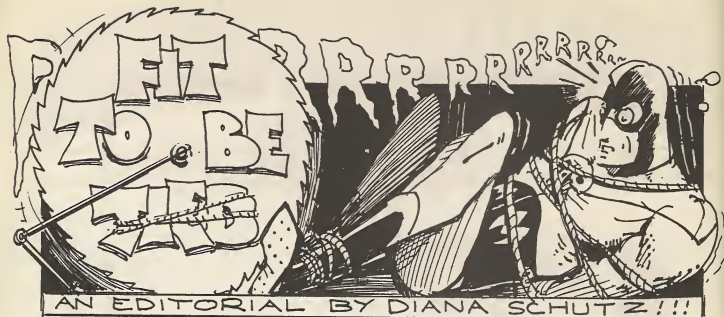
1983 Jaime Hernandez

Also publisher of  
the soon-to-be-  
released deluxe  
collection—

The Complete E.C. Segar  
**Popeye**



King Features Syndicate



My razor-blade smile goes out to Michael T. Gilbert for this sharp logo. The following installment of FIT TO BE TIED is brought to you with singular style from the delicate mind and dangerous nature of ye editor: I'm an electric WIRE stuck inside your head--ooh!

This is not an editorial. Today, this column is an apology.

\*\*\*\*\*

I always seem to be apologizing--a certain editor tells me we (former) Catholics have a gift for that.

First of all, I'd like to apologize to Pacific Comics, specifically to Steve and Bill Schanes and to David Scroggy. In the last issue of THE TELEGRAPH WIRE, in the context of the Scroggy interview, I took the liberty of taking a potshot at one of PC's titles. Rather than bring up the subject for discussion in the interview itself, I threw in my sardonic comment after the fact in a caption to an illustration. My intent was not, in any way, to impugn the entire Pacific line, but merely to make a point that I felt should be brought to light in regard to the particular title. In so doing, however, I ignored the primary function of THE TELEGRAPH WIRE, which is to promote the comics industry, and I ignored the function of our interview pieces, which is to highlight--not to denigrate--the comics and creators in question. This is not to say that I view this magazine as a mere hype sheet--all fanzines are to some extent promotional tools, yes, but criticism, though it has a time and place, should be reserved for its proper time and place. In conversation, Bill Schanes admitted to me that he was all in favour of constructive criticism; consequently, what I should have written last issue about said title is to be found in this issue's review column. Mea culpa.

I'd also like to apologize to the fine folks at Eclipse Comics, Dean Mullaney and cat yronwode, for failing to report any Eclipse news last issue. It seems that, somewhere between Guerneville and Berkeley, the mischievous post office gremlins managed to

gobble up an entire run of Eclipse press releases. Hopefully, with this issue, the situation has been remedied.

While I'm at it, let me apologize to WIRE columnists John Barrett, Tom Whitmore, Bob Schreck, Don Chin, and Clay Geerdes for not having the room to run their columns this issue. Let me also apologize to Howard Chaykin, who was told that he'd see an article on AMERICAN FLAGG! in this installment of Clay's "Comix Wave". Next issue, Howard, I promise!

I'd also like to apologize to the several readers who responded to my exhortations and sent in letters of comment, as our lettercol had to be cut due to space considerations.

Furthermore, I must apologize to my interviewees for butchering their interviews this issue, especially Jan Strnad, but space was obviously at a real premium and I wanted to give everyone at least a little bit of a say.

Since I'm on the subject, I might as well apologize to my readers, very few of whom got last issue's reference to Will Eisner's Nylon Rose when I quoted her "Hubba hubba, snort, woof woof!" in the letters column. (I must admit, though, that line really is an immortal one. Personally, I'm especially fond of the "woof woof". I figure any gal who can bark like a dog has got real class!)

I do have a few more brief apologies to make. One to my boyfriend, on behalf of AT&T. One to my publisher, for constantly having to make apologies. And finally, one to my mother and father, for having been born in the first place.

And to all those whom I've forgotten to mention, but possibly offended or certainly will offend at some future date, God help me I'm sorry!

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THE TELEGRAPH WIRE #16, August/September 1984. Published bimonthly by Comics and Comix, Inc., 2461 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley, CA, 94704. Copyright (C) 1984 individual contributors. All rights reserved. Subscriptions: \$4/six issues. Publisher: John Barrett. Editor: Diana Schutz. Inspiration: Panther Beach, Santa Cruz. Cover Logo: Tom Orzechowski. Cover Design: Fantagraphics Books. Printed at Western Offset in San Diego. All information contained herein is accurate to the best of our knowledge. This one's for restless, hotheaded AnnE: because she's a woman in love.  
\*\*\*\*\* 2 \*\*\*\*\*

In a savage era before the dawn of history,  
four sorcerers committed a heinous crime  
of torture and murder —  
and thought they got away with it.

Now it is 1984.  
They're about to find out they were wrong.

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& Val Mayerik

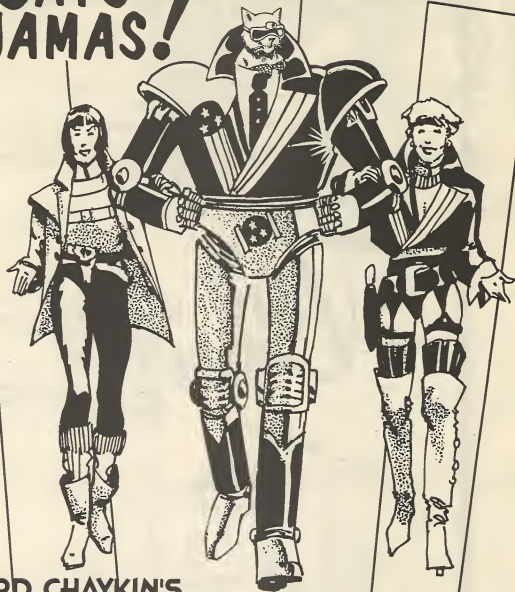


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# MAIN LINES

BY E. "SCOOP" YARBER

Due to odd shenanigans perpetrated by the neurotic leprechauns who collect these news items, no Eclipse news appeared in last issue's "Main Lines". To make things up to Guerneville's finest, we'll lead off this issue's abbreviated installment with them... Eclipse Comics editors Dean Mullaney and cat yronwode served as judges of the "Funny Tub" competition at the 11th annual Bathtub Regatta for the Children's Hospital Medical Center of Northern California. Eclipse also donated 5000 comics to the July 28th affair; the company's presence at the regatta due in large measure to the offices of Comics & Comix' own Tom Walton... ECLIPSE MONTHLY ends with issue #10. Replacing it on the schedule will be a regular book devoted to B.C. Boyer's "The Masked Man". Back-up in MASKED MAN #1 will be "Hiram Nash" by E. Yarber and Val Mayerik... Eclipse books colored by laser scan are rising in price to \$1.75. 20T! is the only lasered title to remain at \$1.50; neither will the mechanically colored DNAGENTS-related titles make the price jump. Copies of AZTEC ACE #4 and MS. TREE #9 were labelled with the new price but invoiced to dealers at the old rate. Since there had been no advance notice of price changes, dealers were only required to pay as though the books were \$1.50... Richard Howell will be pencilling the "Amber" back-up in SURGE #2 as well as pencilling DNAGENTS #15 and #17. The continuities of DNAGENTS and CROSSFIRE will become linked as a romance develops between Crossfire and DNA'er Rainbow. Ah, love...

Pacific Comics' ELRIC #7 will appear in August. Michael T. Gilbert and George Freeman provide the art, while Roy Thomas scripts the adaptation of the second Elric novel... SOMERSET HOLMES has been optioned for motion pictures by Pressman Films. Bruce Jones and April Campbell will write the screenplay and serve as associate producers...

Comics formerly published by Capital Publications will now appear under the First Comics imprint. NEXUS and THE BADGER will have their own books, while WHISPER's fate has not yet been announced... NEXUS character Clonezone the Hilariator will appear in a "Munden's Bar" back-up strip by Mike Baron and Steve Rude for GRIMJACK #6... DC and First will be putting out at least two books featuring crossovers between characters from the two companies. The first should



Richard Howell pencils a lovely Amber in the back-up feature to SURGE #2

Heathcliff (C) McNaught Syndicate Inc.  
Fraggle Rock (C) Henson Associates Inc.  
Ewoks TM and (C) Lucasfilm Ltd. (LFL)



Strawberry Shortcake (C) American Greeting Corp.  
Planet Terry and Spider-Man (C) Marvel Comics Group

Marvel's new Star line to debut in December. Pictured above, clockwise from top left, are Heathcliff, Fraggle Rock, Strawberry Shortcake, The Ewoks, Planet Terry, and of course Spider-Man.

appear within a year... A current inter-company crossover is THE P.I.'s, a team-up between First's Mike Mauser and Aardvark-Vanahelm's Ms. Tree, beginning a three-issue run in September. Creators of both characters are involved, with a script by Max Collins and art by Joe Staton and Terry Beatty. Look for guest appearances by Mike Mist and Alec Tronn... A record-setting seven Eagle Awards went to Howard Chaykin and AMERICAN FLAGGI! The book won in nearly every category it could be nominated in, including favorite penciller, writer, book, character, and story...

Among upcoming Fantagraphics projects are a comic-book sized edition of new HUGO stories by Milton Knight, and a collection of the complete Popeye "Thimble Theatre" newspaper strips by the immortal E.C. Segar...

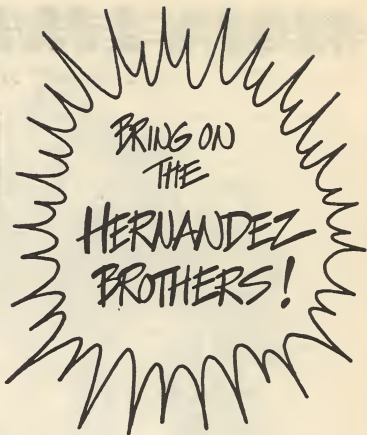
Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez will take over pencilling chores on THE NEW TEN TITANS with issue #7; George Perez to remain on the series as co-editor and cover artist. Perez will devote most of his energy to the CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS maxi-series and a graphic novel... Walter Koenig, best known to TV fans as "Chekov", will soon make his debut as a comic book scripter. Appropriately enough, the story is called "Chekov's Choice" and it will of course appear in an upcoming issue of STAR TREK... More DC baxter reprint books are scheduled, the first to appear in September. A MAN-BAT one-shot reprinting the earliest adventures of Batman's peculiar pal will be followed by three issues of THE IMMORTAL DR. FATE, which will showcase appearances the mystical character made in FIRST ISSUE SPECIAL and THE FLASH...

ELFQUEST #20 ships on August 21, 1984. Although the popular series will end once and for all with that issue, WarP Graphics reports that #21 will appear in December. The "extra" issue will run letters on #20 and the entire series plus recounting the behind-the-scenes activity that went into the series. Unpublished sketches from the eight-year history of ELFQUEST will illustrate the issue...

MARVEL TEAM-UP is going the way of MMS buttons. After Spider-Man joins forces with the X-Men in MTU #150, the book will be no more. December will see the first issue of THE WEB OF SPIDER-MAN. The TEAM-UP team of Louise Simonson, Greg Larroque, and Mike Esposito will handle the new title. The next time you feel busy, just think of all the places poor Peter Parker has to be each month!



Iszy, Maggie, and Hopey  
(C) Jaime Hernandez.  
Luba and Errata Stigmata  
(C) Gilbert Hernandez



The fall of 1982 marked Fantagraphics' publication of the first issue of LOVE AND ROCKETS. A collaborative/creative effort by the Hernandez Brothers, Gilbert, Jaime, and Mario, LOVE AND ROCKETS has gone on to receive high critical acclaim, from both fans and professionals alike. Canadian cartoonist Ken Steacy claims it's one of the few comics worth killing trees for! Certainly, LOVE AND ROCKETS is my favourite comic and perhaps the only one in today's market with an in-built appeal to the female reader-ship: with its sensitivity and lyrical expression, its stories of honest human drama, and its wide cast of living, breathing, solid, true-to-life female characters, it gives new meaning to its adopted rallying cry of "Bring on the Women!"

Almost two years after the release of LOVE AND ROCKETS #1, I finally had the great pleasure of meeting Los Bros. Hernandez. The brothers themselves are quiet and unassuming, yet totally sincere about their work, approaching it with a rare integrity—one that has not gone unnoticed outside Fantagraphics Manor, as Los Bros. have also recently become the creative team on MR. X for Canada's Vortex Publications.

One sunny morning at this year's San Diego Con, the Hernandez Brothers joined me for the following interview and I owe them all a great deal of thanks for the time and effort they invested in it—particularly in light of the previous night's heavy shenanigans!

This interview was transcribed by Eric Yarber, copy-edited by the Hernandez Brothers, with final edits by yours truly. Special thanks to Peter Sanderson for his invaluable assistance on this project so near and dear to my heart.

-- Diana Schutz

DIANA SCHUTZ: To begin with, how did LOVE AND ROCKETS come into being?

JAIME HERNANDEZ: It was mostly [Gilbert's] fault.

DIANA: It's your fault, Gilbert?

GILBERT HERNANDEZ: Well, it's basically Mario and I who had--

MARIO HERNANDEZ: Well, it's your fault to have been published by Gary [Groth]...

GILBERT: We got some free printing time from a friend of Mario's.

MARIO: We thought we were going to get this printed for free, but we only got half of it--that was the negatives. So we thought, "Well, let's go for it." Y'know, "We can afford this." And we did this with a 1970 fan mentality. We were still thinking about fanzines that used to cost 50¢, so that's what we were basically going to do. And then [Gilbert and Jaime] started showing me all this artwork and I said, "When did you guys start drawing like this?" (Laughter) "When did you start doing stuff like this?" It was a total surprise. And then we got it printed up.

DIANA: So how did that first black-and-white fanzine evolve into the first Fantagraphics issue with a color cover?

GILBERT: Okay, now that was my doing. Before we even advertised, I thought, "Well, maybe we can get some free advertising by getting it reviewed--whether it's blasted or praised or whatever." We had no idea what would happen. So I thought, "Yeah, let's go to the source." I said, "I'm gonna send two issues to THE COMICS JOURNAL. If we can take their criticism, we

can take anything!" So I sent two copies off to Gary and forgot about it, and a couple of weeks later he wrote back a letter saying how much he liked it, and in the letter he said, "We're thinking of publishing our own comic books; how would you guys like to go with us as publishers?" And we went like, "Gee whiz, twist my arm." [Laughter] So we added the 32 extra pages to the first issue that we already did--

MARIO: That's why "BEM" is so disappointed.

GILBERT: Right.

MARIO: Because it was kind of like filling in the rest of the issue.

DIANA: What's the division of labor like between you guys? You've each done separate stories but you've also worked together. What works best?

GILBERT: Oh, with LOVE AND ROCKETS, I like to do my stuff myself.

MARIO: LOVE AND ROCKETS is basically *our* comic to do what we want to do. Our own comic where Jaime gets to do what he wants to do, I'll do what I do, whenever.

GILBERT: But that doesn't mean that I won't collaborate.

MARIO: We've had collaborations: the cover of LOVE AND ROCKETS #1 was kind of a collaboration between Gilbert and Jaime.

DIANA: So now, Jaime and Gilbert, you're both working on MR. X. Mario, are you involved with that at all?

MARIO: Yeah, I didn't get credit, but I co-wrote.

GILBERT: Yeah, he co-plotted.

DIANA: Jaime, how do you feel about drawing your brothers' story as opposed to your own?

JAIME: It's great because I know where Gilbert's coming from when he writes. I know his style, so whatever he writes I know exactly what to put down.

DIANA: I understand from the LONE STAR EXPRESS interview that you have this strange method of putting together your own strips--you jump around with the artwork and the writing. Is the work easier to do when you've got this coherent storyline from your brothers, or do you still jump around?

JAIME: With my own stuff in LOVE AND ROCKETS I still jump around like crazy, but I've gotten more disciplined as I've been going along, so MR. X is getting easier. I follow Gilbert's script and his breakdowns and I just put it down.

GILBERT: For me, MR. X is a little hard to do right now because I've never worked with a full script, and with MR. X I *have* to, so there's a lot of stuff I'd like to add when I see the book already finished. There are so many things that I'd want to change, but I can't. So I'm getting used to that.

DIANA: To go back to LOVE AND ROCKETS, most of the stories are set in the barrio and given all the Hispanic-American culture in the book, how is it that that is made accessible to the comic market when that market is largely not Hispanic-American? Why is that working?

GILBERT: We're just wonderful. [Laughter]

JAIME: No, because we're just doing people.

GILBERT: [The Hispanic-American culture] is just the background. It's a setting that's almost never used. When [Hispanic] characters are used, they are usually banditos or in a revolution or they're starving or something like that. We're doing people stories and

using a setting that hasn't been used too much before. That's part of the popularity of it, I think.

DIANA: Would you describe the work, then, as human drama stories?

GILBERT: I'd like to think so.

OIANA: Given our comic book market, what do you think the potential is for success of stories like that?

GILBERT: We're never going to sell like THE X-MEN or anything like that, but I'd like to think that perhaps, well, "Heartbreak Soup" might become something like TINTIN--something that lasts *forever*.

OIANA: What's your target audience? Who are you aiming at?

GILBERT: Ourselves, first of all.

MARIO: Yeah, we want to please ourselves first, but we realize that we can't be too indulgent--which is what's wrong with a lot of comic books...but what was the question again?

OIANA: Who are you aiming at? Or, better still: In the past couple of months you've been doing store appearances and you've been to a couple of conventions; who are your fans?

GILBERT: Regular people, so far.

MARIO: And mostly people who don't read comics. A lot of people who don't read comics...and what's really nice about LOVE AND ROCKETS is that people are passing it around, and people say they re-read it, which is nice.

GILBERT: That's the biggest compliment I get: when people say they can read "Heartbreak Soup" over and over and still get something out of it. That's really a compliment.

OIANA: How did you get into comics? I gather you were all reading comics as kids.

GILBERT: Yes, we were born with a comic book in our hands!

MARIO: Our mother collected comics in the '40s.

GILBERT: But *her* mother, our grandmother, wouldn't let her keep them. So our mother had to hide 'em. She had all of 'em, I mean all the CAPTAIN MARVELS...

JAIME: CAPTAIN MARVEL, BLACKHAWK, THE SPIRIT, all that stuff.

GILBERT: She could have put these collections to shame. And her mom threw them out!

JAIME: Mom vowed that would never happen to *her* kids.

GILBERT: She encouraged comic books because she liked them so much, but here's an interesting story. She vowed *she* would never do that, right? Have you ever heard of those Martian cards?

DIANA: The "Mars Attack" cards? Yes.

GILBERT: Okay. I had almost the entire collection. And I was a little kid but I was smart enough to know that I wanted to keep these, right? So, one day I came home from school and they were gone. I asked my mother where they were and she said she threw them out! [Laughter] And I tell that story to her now and I ask, "Do you know how *much* those Martian cards are worth?" and she goes, "I don't want to hear it!" And she knew better, though, she knew better. She knew what she was doing.

DIANA: So what comics were you reading as kids? I know, LITTLE ARCHIE...

MARIO: Yeah, LITTLE ARCHIE, LITTLE DOT, DENNIS THE MENACE, CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED...

JAIME: Everything that came out in the early '60s... FAMOUS MONSTERS, early CREEPY and EERIE...

MARIO: THE JAGUAR, lots of DCs, ADVENTURE COMICS, Jesse Marsh's TARZAN...

GILBERT: HERBIE, SUPERMAN, LOIS LANE...that stuff. The Bizarros have yet to be equalled!

DIANA: Who were your major influences, now looking back?

GILBERT: All of them. LOVE AND ROCKETS is a little bit of all of it. I mean, there's HOT STUFF in it, there's even DRAG CARTOONS--

MARIO: DRAG CARTOONS with Alex Toth and Mel Keefer, people like that.

GILBERT: We read just about everything and took it all in. MAO magazine...

MARIO: Yeah, we were always reading comics. There were always stacks of comics by the bed, comics when we were eating, when we'd go to the bathroom, everywhere. Comics constantly. And we were drawing our own, too. Little fold-the-paper-in-half and draw. That's where we honed our chops, so to speak.

DIANA: Do you read any new comics?

GILBERT: Yeah, we look at them.

MARIO: I get AMERICAN FLAGS!

DIANA: You look at them, or...?

GILBERT: We read them and look at them, but--

MARIO: I'm more of a comics fan than these guys are. They're more critical about what they read, and I'm disappointed in a lot of stuff I read, but I read it.

DIANA: Jaime, do you read any of the new comics?

JAIME: Sure, but I don't enjoy a lot of them. [Laughs] We won't mention any names, but that's the truth. I won't lie.

DIANA: What about some of your major influences outside of comics?

MARIO: Films, definitely. Rock and Roll. We love foreign films. We used to go to the movies all the time when we were kids and we saw everything. Great double bills like *The Incredible Mr. Limpet* and *Dr. Strangelove*. [Laughs] Those were the type of bills they used to have, and we'd go see movies like this



Mr. X meets Luba in the pages of his own comic.

and just really get knocked out by all this stuff.

GILBERT: Not to mention confused.

DIANA: What about now? Do you guys still go to the new release movies?

GILBERT: Oh sure. We see all the comic book movies. They're not necessarily comic book movies, but they could be. Things like *Ghostbusters*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and that sort of stuff. Like comic books, we don't always enjoy them but we go see them.

DIANA: What about Rock and Roll? I understand you were once in a band--or are you still?

GILBERT: More or less. Jaime and I were in a band about 19... When did we start?

JAIME: About 1980.

GILBERT: We were in a band, kind of a joke band, called "The Beer Guts", which--

MARIO: But they were good, though...tight, fast.

GILBERT: The music was serious: kind of post-punk Rock and Roll.

MARIO: We were in for everything. We were in there in the glitter movement, we were in there in the punk movement--

JAIME: That's right, we were there.

MARIO: I was a hippie once!

DIANA: Listen, let me ask about the women. "Bring on the women!"

JAIME: Yay!

MARIO: Yay, where are they?

GILBERT: Quite a few of them around, let me tell you.

DIANA: As male creators, how is it that you have achieved such insight into female characters? I mean, what is it that you guys are doing that no other male comic book writer can do?

JAIME: We're doing people.

GILBERT: First of all, I just love women. I think women are great. And I mean it, though. Some of these [other writers] want to like women, and they think they're doing good women characters, but they're not. I like women and I like them as people, not as objects, not as a different race or alien creatures or something like that. I really honestly like women so that way I'm gonna treat them with respect as characters in my work.



Bring on the women!

(C) Jaime Hernandez

(C) Vortex Comics





Photo (C) Clay Geerdes

GILBERT, JAIME, and MARIO HERNANDEZ in Berkeley

JAIME: I love to draw them as well, so that even makes it better.

MARIO: That's the indulgent part of it.

DIANA: Okay, I see your point, but there are differences between men and women and you as men have been able to capture those differences. Are the women that you're doing based on people that you know really well?

GILBERT: Some are women we know really well and some people we simply observe. A lot of it is observation, paying attention and getting it right. Not criticizing a person.

JAIME: Yeah. I guess that's the thing of it. We pay attention.

GILBERT: We pay attention and we don't criticize in our minds. If a woman's acting silly or something, we look at them but we don't criticize them. I think, "Well, she's doing that for a particular reason."

MARIO: It's the way that people react to women, too, the way they react to different women. It's really weird to see men, and other women too, react to each other. And if you can see that sometimes, you really get some strange ideas.

GILBERT: It's close observation and respect.

DIANA: Something came up at Petuniacon on panel: one gal said that some of her female friends were turned off by LOVE AND ROCKETS because of the size of Luba's breasts.

GILBERT: Well, there are a lot of women built that way, y'know. Particularly in Southern California where I live. As a matter of fact, there is a woman with a figure almost identical to Luba's living down my street, so it isn't unrealistic.

MARIO: I think it adds to Luba's mystique because she does have large breasts...

GILBERT: I can understand the complaints, though, because women with big busts have always been treated pretty rotten in the entertainment industry as well as in the real world. But why can't the people who don't like Luba's figure accept her as a character

with a body they don't happen to like? If people think she's grotesque, then hey, she's grotesque to these people. Fine. Nobody's perfect. I think trying to make a good, solid character in Luba is more of a challenge than if she was built like Jennifer Beals. She'd be accepted a lot quicker if she was. But aren't those first impressions killers, though?

MARIO: Is this Luba from Earth 1 or Earth 2? [Laughs]

GILBERT: That's right. There are two Lubas. The one in LOVE AND ROCKETS #1 is from Earth 2 and is not the same Luba from "Heartbreak Soup". Same name, same build, that's all. I mean, to be turned off because of that, I think, is a mistake. I can understand why, but I'd like to think that there's a character there.

MARIO: I'm really surprised that a lot of people haven't said that about Penny Century.

DIANA: No! No! No! I want to be Penny Century!

GILBERT: But you see, that's just it!

MARIO: She's so free, y'know. The way I look at it, I would think a lot of women would get offended, saying, "Well look, she keeps running off with that, millionaire..."

GILBERT: She seems, the most of all the characters, a male fantasy. Not necessarily Jaime's fantasy, but...

MARIO: Yeah, that's the way I see her.

DIANA: Is she a male fantasy, Jaime?

JAIME: Look, she's "perfect". She's built, beautiful long hair...

MARIO: Yeah, I guess women would be envious of her because she can do whatever she wants, and that's the way she lives. But she happens to be perfect physically, y'know. It's just that, and being beautiful.

DIANA: Okay, in the same vein, let's talk about sex!

MARIO: Let's!

DIANA: Penny, Maggie, Hopey, Izzy...tell me their sexual orientations. It seems pretty obvious that Hopey is bisexual, if not lesbian.

JAIME: When I find out I'll let you know.

MARIO: That's the thing. A lot of our stuff isn't thrown in people's faces. This is a comic that's gonna make you think. Look at SOMERSET HOLMES, for one thing. One of the female characters was a lesbian, and they kind of threw it in your face. You gotta have some kind of mystique to that, and leave

SHE'S ONLY FIVE FOOT TALL, HAS A CUTE FACE AND ASS, IS KIND OF NAIVE ABOUT THINGS, AND LIVES WITH HER BEST FRIEND HOPEY, WHO IS JUST AS CUTE, A LITTLE REBELLIOUS, AND IS EVEN SHORTER. THEY LIVE IN A SMALL RUN-DOWN APARTMENT IN A MEXICAN NEIGHBORHOOD, ALWAYS WITHOUT FOOD, MONTHS BEHIND ON RENT, AND RUMOR HAS IT THAT THEY'RE LESBIANS. HOW PERFECT CAN YOU GET? THE ONLY THING SHE DOESN'T HAVE IS SUPER POWERS. BUT, WAIT! MAGGIE HAS A JOB.



(C) Jaime Hernandez

Are they or aren't they???



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ALLOW 3-4 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY



(C) Mario Hernandez

Mario's alien finds humans a curious species.

people guessing with a few little details. That's what makes comics exciting, I think.

GILBERT: Where is it that Hopey's a lesbian? I've never seen that in LOVE AND ROCKETS.

DIANA: Well, it's kind of her undying love for Maggie--

GILBERT: Yeah, but you could have a good friend, live with her...

DIANA: Yes, but as you said, Mario, there is that mystique, and this one is definitely sexual. C'mon, Jaime, you tell us.

JAIME: Okay, I think a lot of people think Maggie and Hopey are lesbians. I'm not going to say they are and I'm not going to say they aren't. But people think that because they sleep together in the same bed and because they walk around their house in their underwear. So that makes them lesbians? I don't understand that.

DIANA: No, but I think that there have been subtle hints that Hopey is at least bisexual, not necessarily lesbian. But anyway, tell me about the punk thing in regard to the women.

GILBERT: That's pretty much about the people Jaime and I were hanging around with at the time when we came up with LOVE AND ROCKETS. We were observing them and saw them as really funny people, especially the young girls. They were exactly like Maggie and Hopey, more or less. They were really nice and really funny and energetic and they were always running around, they did what they wanted to, they lived where they wanted to...it was just really great.

JAIME: This whole punk thing opened our eyes to a lot of things.

GILBERT: More on a personal level than a political one.



(C) Jaime Hernandez

Maggie goes through changes in LOVE AND ROCKETS #8.

DIANA: What are your future plans for LOVE AND ROCKETS?

GILBERT: Well, I'd like to continue "Heartbreak Soup" for the next 3000 years, but I want to continue experimenting with different things because I don't want to get into a rut. So in the future, probably issue #11, Mario and I are going to collaborate on a lengthy experimental story, and if [the fans] don't like it...well, it's one issue. C'mon, you're going to get "Mechanics" and "Heartbreak Soup" in the next issue, right?

MARIO: Yeah, I figure that if you become too complacent...

GILBERT: Yeah. With something like "Heartbreak Soup" I could become very complacent and could coast off it for the next ten years--and I'm not going to do that.

## MECHANICS PART THREE



(C) Jaime Hernandez

"Mechanics" splash page from LOVE AND ROCKETS #8

DIANA: What about Maggie and Hopey? Jaime, you've got a couple of changes in store for Maggie, I understand.

JAIME: Oh yeah. In upcoming issues, Maggie goes into a really deep depression and eats herself silly.

MARIO: She puts on a lot of weight.

JAIME: The foodyear blimp!

DIANA: What's that going to do to her sense of self?

GILBERT: I think it's gonna bug the fans more, I'll tell you. [laughter]

MARIO: Yeah, Jaime's gonna give the fans what they need, not what they want.

JAIME: I want to be fair to myself and to the fans and to people in general. I'm not gonna keep everything "perfect" for my sake, or for their sake, or

for anybody's sake. If I want one of my characters to be a certain type and I think, "Yeah, they'll be this way because I like that type of person," I'll think about it and I'll say, "No, too perfect." That makes it even more realistic, whether I like it or not.

MARIO: Because life doesn't travel in set patterns, really. Y'know, something comes out of the blue, just out of left field, and you think, "My gosh, why did this happen?" And it's disturbing to people because it's disturbing when it happens to them and their life all of a sudden changes.

JAIME: I was criticized for a thing that happened in LOVE AND ROCKETS #4, "One Hundred Rooms", where Maggie "sorta" gets raped by that guy Casey and then she ends up saying she liked it.

MARIO: How do you sorta get raped? See, I saw it as just a weird thing that happened. A weird situation--not as black or white.

JAIME: Well, what I was trying to do with that was... The intro page says, "This is Maggie, she's a 'perfect' comic book character..." I did that because that was my review of my own work. The whole thing was sarcastic as hell. And I was just saying, "C'mon, isn't it wonderful that she's little, she's got this nice little butt, she's a teenager even, my God, and she's a mechanic! How 'perfect' can you get?"

GILBERT: He's making fun of those "perfect" Marvel characters.

JAIME: Perfect in their imperfections.

GILBERT: Yeah, they have these "perfect" problems.

JAIME: And then the thing about her having enjoyed sleeping with Casey was because she's not the perfect liberated woman. That's what I was trying to say: that she likes going to bed with guys, instead of like she's so liberated that "No, don't you touch me!" --and I guess some people just didn't get it. I didn't bring it out as well.

GILBERT: Well, I think what people had difficulty with is that Casey starts apologizing like he raped her. I mean, obviously he didn't. He looked at her and she looked at him and they did it, right? But you have him apologizing like he raped her. That's what kind of threw people off.



Luba,  
Queen  
of Women

(C) Gilbert Hernandez

JAIME: And also because I left so little space for that scene. As usual I was jumping from page to page, so I only had so many panels to stick that scene in there. I didn't have enough room to explain what really went on. So that was my fault. I take full responsibility.

DIANA: So basically, though, what you're saying is that you want to give your characters *real* problems.

JAIME: Whether I like them or not.

OIANA: Okay, just one last question for the three of you. Do you want to be doing comics forever, or are there other things that you want to do?

JAIME: Right now, LOVE AND ROCKETS is *exactly* what I want to do, and my "Mechanics" series is *exactly* what I want to do right now. Later, if I feel different, I'll do something else.

GILBERT: Yeah, I'd like to do different things. But right now I'm gonna do LOVE AND ROCKETS, and if things change, hopefully I'll change with them.

MARIO: But for me, I think of doing a lot of other things--animation, movies, things you can do with your art too. Sculpture. I wanna have sculptured covers. Y'know, really kind of experiment with some stuff and maybe wake up some people out there in the U.S.A. I mean, I sit around and think, "Are we the only people in the world who are doing this--outside of France or maybe a few people on the east coast or something?" Y'know, "Why us?" And then I think, "Why not us?" Let's kick ass!



(C) Jaime Hernandez

The supposed "rape",  
from LOVE AND ROCKETS #4







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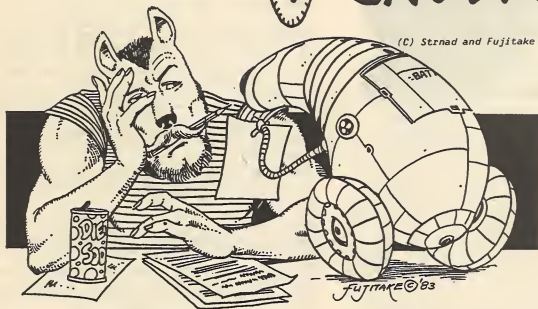


# HOT DOGGIN' IT PART 1

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JAN STRNAD

(C) Strnad and Fujitake

by  
GARY GROTH



The first four-color title to be published by Fantagraphics, *DALGODA* is the story of an extra-terrestrial canine who comes to Earth in an effort to enlist aid in saving his home planet Canida from an alien invasion. Jan Strnad, the book's writer, is a longtime comics fan turned professional, who has worked for both Marvel and DC--most recently he collaborated with Gil Kane on DC's *SWORD OF THE ATOM* mini-series. His work has also been published in *HEAVY METAL* and various underground comix, usually illustrated by acclaimed artist Richard Corben. Jan is also an outspoken critic of the comics medium, as the following interview will attest.

Strnad was interviewed by Fantagraphics publisher Gary Groth in June of this year. Before the tape started rolling, Groth and Strnad exchanged banter about Matt Denn's review of *DALGODA* #1 in *THE TELEGRAPH WIRE* and Don Thompson's reviews in *THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE*. The conversation proceeds from that point.

JAN: I have a few rules for reviewers, some of which would be pertinent to the Matt Denn review. One rule of mine is to read the material before writing the review. I noticed Denn got only three pages into *ATLANTIS* and halfway through *DALGODA* before rendering his judgements. I feel that when a reviewer does that, he's not paying his dues. If you are going to review something, you are obligated to read it. It may be redeemed in the last sentence on the last page, you never know. But that's one rule. And another one is: Never review the work of friends. I think now I would say: Never review the work of enemies either. [laughter] You're obviously biased against people you hate, as Denn definitely was. And the third rule is: Don't make up quotes. If something is poorly written, you should be able to quote it and to show people that it's poorly written with-

out having to make something up. Now, all in all, I would say Matt Denn's was the most incompetent review I've ever read. And I've read quite a few. I can't imagine why the editor of the publication would allow someone like that to be writing reviews. I think there is an editorial responsibility to weed out the incompetents.

GARY: I think it was an act of editorial desperation.

JAN: Well, I just don't agree with the theory that any review is better than none. I think it's better to not guide the public at all than to misguide them. But let's see--Don Thompson. Don is another case, very interesting. I always look forward to his reviews.

GARY: In what way, exactly?

JAN: Well, he represents a segment of the comic-reading population that we tend to forget is there. And for that reason alone I think there is value in Don's comments, so I always look at them very carefully and I consider them. Even though I rarely agree with them.

Now, Don's complaint was that the appearance of the segment of Earth society that we showed in the first issue of *DALGODA* was anachronistic. He didn't accept my explanation about that and felt that it should have looked futuristic. But as I have thought on that, I just think of more and more things that don't really change that much, that I would expect to see in a future world, and one of the things that Don mentions is eyeglasses. I expect eyeglasses are going to be with us for a good long while. Already, at this point in time, we have hard contact lenses, soft contact lenses, 24-hour-a-day contact lenses, we have a surgical procedure where they use a laser to score the cornea of the eye to correct the person's vision, and yet, look at all the people who wear glasses for one reason or another. For some of



JAN STARNAD and dog

them, their vision simply can't be corrected by contact lenses. And there are a lot of people who just don't want to mess with contacts and who can't afford costly eye surgery. I think that's going to continue to be the case, especially in a world like Dalgoda's where the fruits of technology are not equally available to everybody. And the point that I made in the first issue, that perhaps I should have made more strongly, is that even though the technology does exist, it isn't available to everybody, and a lot of people are living in an anachronistic society; in future issues I'm going to go into this in a little bit more depth. Not much, because it's not the sort of thing that really interests me, explaining the world. It's less interesting to me than exploring the characters. I do get into this a little more thoroughly in issue #4, where Posey Ravencraft leaves high-tech society and is busted back to "Low-Tech, Level One" society, and of course he takes it very poorly.

GARY: Referring back to Don's criticism, there's a sense in which fans demand a kind of factitious consistency without seeing the contradiction in not demanding that same kind of consistency in psychological or emotional requirements.

JAN: What do you mean? Expand on this for me.

GARY: Well, the kind of consistency Don was talking about is something that I'm largely impervious to. It didn't even occur to me, as I was editing the book, that things ought to look drastically or radically different. I am much more concerned with how characters are acting and reacting, the emotional truthfulness of the characters rather than the kind of scenery by which they're surrounded. Although, obviously, you have to have a well-lived-in and consistent world. It seems to me that fans put up with an awful lot of absurd emotional baggage in comic books that they accept on its face, while demanding all kinds of...sort of supererogatory--

JAN: Well, I think that what we have is a case in point where Don's observation has some value, because I think it's something that I need to think about more in creating the world and new technology and so forth--the visual aspect of it that I tend to just leave absolutely to the artist. If I say, "They hop in a car and drive off," I don't really care if it's a car with wheels or a hovercraft or a big bubble--whatever the artist wants to imagine.

GARY: I think this means your priorities are different.

JAN: Yeah, absolutely. But on the other hand, I

probably should be more aware of that sort of thing. I think it would help make the world more concrete in my mind and probably result in a better work. So I am thinking about that, but I think that there are other things in Dalgoda that Don missed apparently, or did not comment on that he should have talked about, rather than spending so much time criticizing the background elements.

GARY: Would you like to enumerate these?

JAN: Yeah, well, the humor for example, whether Dalgoda is humorous or not. Did the humor work or did it fail flat? I think this is the kind of insight he should share with his readers. That is, it's more important to their enjoyment of the work than whether or not a certain character wears a necktie...which, by the way, is something I can see people still doing 200 years from now. We are still wearing pants, for example, which the Kurds invented around the middle of the 16th century. They aren't as baggy as they used to be, but the modern Kurds still wear those baggy pants.

GARY: It's been my observation that fans become far more outraged when their superhero's costume is miscolored than by something--

JAN: Yeah, it's so obvious. This is the way our society is. We fasten on the most obvious and visual aspects of just about everything rather than looking at the more subtle, interior side of things.

GARY: Let me ask you a loaded question then. Do you think that comics elicit a kind of ghettoized response simply because of the standard of material that they've traditionally published?

JAN: Well, you have to be wary of the audience for any medium that is attracted by material of such a low standard as that which pervades the comic book industry right now. Marvel is number one. They sell more books than anybody, they're the biggest company and the most popular company, but they don't put out the best work. Now, the question arises inevitably: If they don't put out the best work, why are they the biggest and most successful? It's the same thing that makes television so awful: that the best work, unfortunately, does not appeal to the most people.

GARY: How would you respond to the argument that it's only sour grapes that's prompting your remarks about Marvel?

JAN: That's probably true. If my book was number one and outsold Marvel, then obviously the perception and intelligence of the audience would be raised significantly in my eyes. But look--when you go for the biggest possible audience, you dilute the experience for everyone. How little entertainment can a company provide and still get people to watch the TV show or buy the comic book? In the case of television, it doesn't matter if people are a little bit entertained or a lot entertained as long as they're sitting there watching the show and seeing the commercials. With Marvel, it doesn't matter if fans like the books they're buying or not. A lot of people buy Marvel comics that they don't even like, books they stopped liking 10 issues ago or *never* really cared for, but they buy it for their collection or hoping it'll get good again or because they're brainwashed...it makes no difference to Marvel why. THE SECRET WARS is the top-selling comic book in America. Why? Because it's the best? Or because people think it's "significant", going to be a collector's item--with half a million copies in print!

I'm just hoping that there are enough people out there who share our particular sensibility and will

think that DALGODA is entertaining enough to pay a higher price for it. They have to want it more than many people want a Marvel book. You have to want a Marvel book 60% worth and readers get very irate when the price threatens to go to 75%. They write in and say, "I've bought every issue and really love it but I'm not going to pay 15% more for it." That's a very low level of loyalty and supports what I said about a low level of entertainment.

GARY: How would you describe what you'd like the average reader of DALGODA to be? Do you have any kind of profile in your own mind as to what kind of reader you think will be attracted to the book?

JAN: [Laughter] I don't know. I really don't have any idea of the typical person who would enjoy DALGODA. All I can tell you is this: what I am looking for are people who enjoy a good story and good artwork and good production and are willing to pay the premium price DALGODA and the other alternative comics are forced to charge. A DALGODA reader has to care more than the average comics fan, but I don't want a religious cult following me. I don't want an ELFQUEST-type audience that is going to put me or Dennis [Fujitake] or Dalgoda on some higher spiritual plane. It would terrify me to be as deluded as the Pinis are.

GARY: Well. If we want to end on an optimistic note, should I ask how you feel about the future of independent comic book publishing or not? Maybe not.

JAN: I don't think so. You know, the deck is so stacked against the independents that it's hard to be optimistic about it. The more I know about it, the less optimistic I can be.

GARY: Well, let me ask you a self-serving question, and that is, why didn't you take DALGODA to, say, Marvel or DC? Was your decision based upon, well, for lack of a better term, ideological or philosophical reasons? Or did the two of us just happen to connect at the same time?

JAN: It was the time at the convention when I saw you walk across the waters of the swimming pool. I realized that here was a messianic figure that I would follow into whatever horizon he led me.

GARY: And you thought that if I could do that, I might have a marginal chance of selling DALGODA?

JAN: Yes, right. Practical reasons, but also, it was because you put Dennis and me together on the project and I felt a certain loyalty to you for that. And the deal was good. It's a character that I really would not want to sell to a company. I like the fact that I share ownership of the character with Dennis and that Dennis and I will be the first recipients of whatever wealth DALGODA may generate. I think that showed a good sense of priority on the part of the publisher.

GARY: I've always questioned that myself, but...

JAN: [Laughter] But, it's a project I take more personally than I can take any project I would do for Marvel or DC, even though I get a fair-enough deal from DC. I have to say that they pay well, and I share eventually, to some extent, in virtually everything that happens with the characters I create for them. But I feel a little closer to DALGODA, for some reason, so that I would hate to sell him to a corporation. It would be like selling my dog to an experimental lab.

GARY: Well, we haven't ended on an upbeat note yet.

JAN: Was this supposed to sell books? Or to alienate most readers?



Dal and Posey in hiding

(C) Stern and Fujitake

GARY: I've been trying for years to figure out a way to do both.

JAN: I see.

GARY: Well, is there anything particularly encouraging you can say about independent publishers and the direct-sales market and the readers and so forth? [Pause] We will note that there is a long pause.

JAN: Yes. A long pause. Let's see. Something encouraging. Gosh, I don't know. I think that one encouraging thing is that we're finding out just how few people it takes to support a comic book. The minimum number is much lower than people ever thought it could be. They used to say, if it doesn't sell over a million copies, they weren't interested. Then it was half a million. Now it's around a hundred thousand for a mainstream book. With bold new attempts by the independents, we're ever-lowering that number to levels that would have boggled people's minds only a few years ago.

GARY: Yes, it astonishes even me. Well, that certainly is encouraging. We're lowering the comics readership month by month.

JAN: If we can just find one guy who'll pay \$60,000 for a copy of DALGODA...



Dalgoda bites off more than he can chew!

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# HOT DOGGIN' IT PART 2 by GARY GROTH

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DENNIS FUJITAKE

DALGODA's artist, Dennis Fujitake, was born and raised and currently resides in Honolulu, Hawaii--the Lucky dog! Though DALGODA is his first sustained effort at a regular comics series, Dennis was a frequent contributor to several prominent comics fanzines of the late '60s and early '70s. Nonetheless, Dennis has entered the field from a career largely outside comics and continues to support himself as a commercial artist, drawing advertisements and freelance t-shirt designs as well as working as a graphic artist at a Honolulu television station. He was interviewed for THE TELEGRAPH WIRE by Fantagraphics publisher Gary Groth.



(C) Strnad and Fujitake

GARY GROTH: Let me ask you about the creative genesis of DALGODA, how you and Jan [Strnad] got to the point where you had a dog character.

DENNIS FUJITAKE: Well, I came up with the basic concept of a sub-space ship. I had more of a military story in mind. Something like the *Silent Service* series on television, where they focused a lot on submarines.

GARY: Is this on the local TV out there [in Honolulu]?

DENNIS: It was an old black-and-white documentary series about the submarines in the Pacific and the Atlantic and how, basically, they fought the war. I always was fascinated by it, it's like a whole different environment, and I thought what I'd do was apply that to outer space, and create an adventure series based on that concept.

GARY: Give it a futuristic setting.

DENNIS: Yeah. With sub-space being, like, under the ocean, and normal space being above the ocean.

GARY: Right.

DENNIS: And I sent all the technical details that I'd worked out to Jan, and Jan went ahead and created an entirely different aspect to it. He created the dog character and everything.

GARY: Now, when you say he created the dog character, you mean he gave you the idea for it, and then you drew up character sketches?

DENNIS: That's right. He suggested that the character look like a dog. It was a humanoid alien, but it had dog-like characteristics and features. And it was my job to do some character sketches. I turned that over to Jan, and he put together the first story.

GARY: Since that was something of a radical change from what you'd originally envisioned, did Jan have to sell you on the idea of a dog character?

DENNIS: Not really. I always liked what Jan wrote, and I was a little disappointed that we couldn't

immediately go into the military angle that I had hoped for. But Jan is saving that for later. What he wants to do is establish a character that people can identify with first of all, and then gradually use the sub-space feature as a sub-plot or just a side-aspect of it.

GARY: You've drawn comic strips before. I happen to know of a number that you've done that haven't been published, and I know of a couple that have been published. But this is the first regular series that you've done. Since you'd not done comics regularly, are you finding the schedule to be particularly tough? How do you approach an average workday, working on the comic?

DENNIS: Well, yeah, it is tough, because I hold down a part-time job, as you know. And trying to get that out of the way, and then come home at the half-day mark, and trying to work on DALGODA is not an easy thing to do. As far as how I handle the workload, I generally do pretty much what [Richard] Corben does; he breaks the pages down on sheets of typing paper and I do that on a little scratchpad, I do little thumbnail sketches of how the panels should be broken down. From that I do my finished pencils, which I Xerox off and send to Jan, and he in turn writes the script and the copy for it, sends it off to you, which you typeset, and then you ship the whole load back to me, and I do the finished inking, while placing the type at the same time.

GARY: Now you and Jan have begun, with the second issue, working in a kind of refined Marvel style, where Jan types up a very complete outline--it's more than an outline, really, because it actually contains dialogue--and then you take it from there, and that gives you the opportunity to have more input into the pacing and the visual storytelling. Do you find that to be the best working arrangement?

DENNIS: Yeah, I like it. It frees me up. In the first issue, Jan wrote a very tight breakdown and script ahead of time, and I had to follow that as

tightly as possible, making just a few changes here and there. I had no objections to that. Actually it saved a lot of time, what with Jan doing all the breakdowns. The way he does it now, he gives me a very detailed outline, and I have the problem of trying to figure out how to break up the pages.

GARY: You've written your own stories. Is Jan the only writer, aside from yourself, obviously, that you've worked with?

DENNIS: No, I've done a couple of other stories for a couple of other people, but I think I enjoy working with Jan the best. I enjoy what he writes, I find myself laughing at the fun parts of the dialogue, and that's unusual.

GARY: Well, now, as I said, you've written your own material, but I assume that you think your greatest strength is as an artist, not as a writer.

DENNIS: Exactly. As you told me, you didn't like my own scripts.

GARY: [Laughter] Yeah, that's right. Let me try to give the readers a little insight into your personality and inclinations and so forth. I know in terms of influences that you like Ditko and Moebius from comics. Just briefly, I assume that you grew up reading comics about the same time I did, and that would be with Marvel in the '60s. Is that correct?

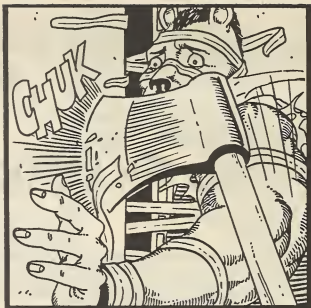
DENNIS: Exactly. I think I started around issue 13 of SPIDER-MAN. Thirteen or 14.

GARY: And then I assume you grew up reading through the Golden Age of Marvel, as it was. How did your interest in comics change in the '70s, if it did, after Marvel went through that incredible creative period? Did you retain as avid an interest in comics?

DENNIS: It began to switch. I no longer had my hero Ditko to look at, except in Charlton books. He was being eased out of Marvel. And so I started to look for other artists I appreciated, people like Alex Toth and Joe Kubert. And then Moebius showed up, and he really blew me away. So, I guess I began to look to the alternate press for my inspiration and new ideas.

GARY: What was it about Ditko's work that you loved so much?

DENNIS: Well, Ditko was an excellent storyteller, and on top of that, he had an interesting grasp of anatomy. His anatomy was very accurate, I thought. And I pretty much learned my anatomy from the way he drew his people. I did a lot of research on my own, and I found that a lot of his stuff was accurate, and I enjoyed reading it. He captured my imagination. I grew up with Peter Parker. And I kind of wished that I was Spider-Man. Whenever Peter Parker was down, I was down; whenever he was up, I was up. And I looked



(C) Stern and Fujitake

forward to seeing another SPIDER-MAN, every month.

GARY: Now, I think one of your greatest strengths as an artist, and I think I've probably told you this before, is your sense of humor, and your ability to put that humor into the work. Has that always been a part of your art? Or is that something that's evolved over the years, do you think?

DENNIS: I guess that it's evolved, as you put it. I enjoy watching television, which is a bad distraction for an artist, but I especially like good sitcoms. So, things like *M\*A\*S\*H*...

GARY: *Mary Tyler Moore*.

DENNIS: *Mary Tyler Moore*, *The Bob Newhart Show*, that sort of thing, *Barney Miller*, where they combine humor and drama, giving you the comedy relief from a lot of drama. Something like *Hill Street Blues* is a good example.

GARY: You live in Honolulu, which means that not only are you not in New York, you're not in the continental United States. You obviously never had a really driving ambition to be a comic book artist. Is that accurate?

DENNIS: Wrong.

GARY: [Laughs] Okay.

DENNIS: About the time that Ditko left SPIDER-MAN, I wanted to take over SPIDER-MAN. I was woefully inadequate to the task, but at that time, I didn't know how bad I was. And I had this idea that I could go on carrying SPIDER-MAN the way Ditko had done—keep the essence, the flavor of the original. And I was strongly disappointed when Johnny Romita took over, because, you know, he was not Ditko, and no one has done justice to SPIDER-MAN and DOCTOR STRANGE since.

GARY: Well, when I said I had the impression you didn't have a driving ambition to be a comics artist, I would assume if you had, you would have gone to New York and tried to ingratiate yourself into one of the companies, but you almost adamantly refused to do that.

DENNIS: At the time that I wanted to take over SPIDER-MAN, I was just out of high school going into college, and it was impractical for me even to consider looking for a full-time job as an



(C) Stern and Fujitake



DENNIS FUJITAKE

artist. And I saw the deterioration that had been going on in mainstream comics. I gradually became disenchanted with what they were doing, and all of a sudden I realized that it was no longer important for me to become a "professional" comic book artist with one of the main companies. I began to feel that I should do it on my own somehow. You know, as you see in the alternate press nowadays.

GARY: About DALGODA, how much input do you have, in terms of adding things to the script, or in the general direction of the book, or areas of concern that lie outside the actual drawing of the book?

DENNIS: Well, basically Jan has most of the story planned out in his head. The way I usually influence him is, when, for example, I do character sketches, or some sketches of ideas that he has, my drawings influence him; just by looking at the drawing of the character, how the character might behave, maybe he'll get some funny ideas from it. The only other changes that I might enforce on my part will be technical ones that I feel are not in keeping with the original details that I outlined to him.

GARY: Now, I know that you'll occasionally add little bits that Jan will pick up on. For example, in the second issue, toward the end, when Posey and Gunner take Dal to the "float room". Posey grabs her by the ass, and I think that's something that you added, which was very funny, and that Jan played up real well. So you--

DENNIS: I thought Jan had missed a bit there. I saw Gunner as being a very aggressive woman who wasn't afraid of sex, and I could see that it would kind of be an interesting play between Dalgoda and herself, her curiosity as to what he was like, and I guess I thought it was a natural thing to have happen.

GARY: And Gunner went through an evolution. I think she was a bit more svelte in the original character sketches, and you fattened her up a little, gave her a little more heft.

DENNIS: The original character...well, in the original character sketches, Gunner was a guy.

GARY: Well, no, I didn't mean the original conception, but when you and Jan determined that she was a woman, I think that she was on the thinner side, and then you and Jan decided that it was a bit too much of a stereotype--women in comics always being perfectly proportioned and all--and you gave her a little more heft. Is that my--

DENNIS: Well, I got carried away drawing her as a good-looking woman.

GARY: You always do.

DENNIS: Jan did not have that in mind. He wanted kind of a beefy, tough-looking, tough-minded broad, and I had to change my drawings, because I enjoy drawing nice-looking females, and this was the first female character that Jan had given me. I got a little carried away, so Jan suggested that we toughen her up a little bit, and I did that.

GARY: One thing I've noticed is you're always very open to suggestions, in terms of if you have something down on paper, and Jan suggests something else, you certainly aren't riveted to your original position.

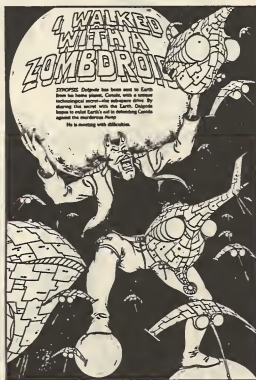
DENNIS: Well, as I pointed out before, Jan has the basic plot in mind, and he knows where he wants to take it. Unless it's a severe change of direction away from what I think the story should be telling, or inconsistencies with some of the technical details, then I'll insist that he do something to get back on track. But otherwise, I pretty much enjoy what he writes, and I find little argument with it.

GARY: To end the interview, I'm trying to think of some way that you can praise your publisher, but that might be pushing things a bit.

DENNIS: My big praise will come when I get my first royalty check.

GARY: You know, you're very single-minded about this, Dennis. I think you said that same thing in that AMAZING HEROES piece. I think that there's a certain lack of faith that you might get a royalty check from me.

DENNIS: Well, Gary, people are suing you for close to \$5 million. I want to get my share before they clean you out.



(C) Strnad and Fujitake

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## COMICS, FANZINES, AND ME: A BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

by Peter Sanderson

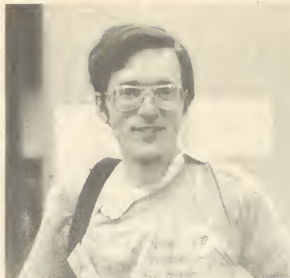
Not many people are invited to write their own obituaries, but this is what the editor of this publication has asked me to do. "Why don't you write about your life in comics? That would be delightful," THE TELEGRAPH WIRE's editor said over the phone in such a sweet voice. But I sensed the thought lying behind her words: "Then I won't have to write it up myself after I obliterate you." For as I write this, Ms. Diana Schutz and I are about to engage in a battle of wills which, she confidently assumes, I will not survive with my faculties intact. Well, then, I shall play her little game and write this piece. Let her think she shall prove the victor. Her overconfidence will be her downfall.

My situation is unique: I am an assistant editor at Marvel and a former OC employee, and yet I am also a columnist and interviewer for THE COMICS JOURNAL and AMAZING HEROES. Back in the 1970s I never thought I'd be in any of these positions, but I can now see that I've been moving towards working in comics all my life. (Space considerations do not permit me to discuss the other, academic side of my life, although my studies of literature and other artforms have obviously greatly influenced my critical writing about comics.)

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I can't recall when I saw my first comic book: I've been reading them as far back as I can remember. At first I only read funny animal books, and, yes, always knew that the stories by the Unknown Writer/Artist who turned out to be Carl Barks were the best of the lot. I read my first superhero comic, the WORLD'S FINEST that introduced the Composite Superman, in the early 1960s, and discovered Marvels rather late in comparison with my contemporaries--1966, the year of the *Batman* TV show craze--when they finally began being distributed in my area. I had no idea that there might be such a thing as Organized Fandom, but I started writing to the comics' letter columns, especially those in the books edited by Julius Schwartz. That was the Golden Age of Comics Letters Pages, when they were frequented by several writers of wit, style, and intelligence, who were given plenty of room in which to display these qualities. My letter-writing career spans two generations of letterhacks: the Lillian/Vartanoff/Friedrich era of the Schwartz letters pages of the late 1960s and the Mullaney/Macchio/Gillis/Gruenwald/Duffy/etc. era of Marvel letters pages in the 1970s. As time passed, my Letters of Comment grew longer and more academic in their analyses, pointing the way to my later work doing analytical articles for fanzines. My best remembered LOC's, though, are the funny ones written to TOM of ORACULA, which presented the Count as a kind of Transylvanian Wile E. Coyote, forever the victim of ignominious disasters.

I found my first comics dealers' convention in 1973, but I still remained an Isolated Fan in these days just before the explosion of cons and direct sales shops until 1976. By this time I was attending graduate school in New York City, and received invitations from ORACULA author Marv Wolfman and Marvel's then Fan Mail Editor Bonnie Wilford to come by and say hello. Within the space of a month I had not only



PETER SANDERSON

Photo courtesy of Ann Lagan

attended my first convention, the OC "Superman's Birthday" Con, where I met Marv, Len Wein, and others, but also visited Bonnie at Marvel, which I learned to my surprise looked like a regular set of offices, and not the halls of Asgard. She introduced me to--among other people--Chris Claremont, who was in his first year of writing what I found to be an intriguing revival of THE X-MEN. I didn't begin seeing comics pros or fans regularly, however, until the Thanks-giving Creation Convention of 1977, where I first met such people as Dean Mullaney, Cat Yronwode, and Peter Gillis. I also received a letter from Kim Thompson, who was returning to America from France to work for this outfit called Fantagraphics, and wanted me to write for them. Oh boy, thought I, a girl from France who likes comics and wants to meet me. However, Kim turned out to be a guy (yes, the secret is now out) and, not knowing much about Fantagraphics or feeling inclined to do fanzine writing, I passed on the offer to write for the fledgling COMICS JOURNAL. But I did become involved in writing for OMNIVERSE, Mark Gruenwald's and Dean Mullaney's fanzine, which attempted to bring order to the morass of comics continuity in those unenlightened times, and which was the forerunner of Mark's OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE.

In 1980 Dean asked me to be his assistant editor on a new "professional fanzine" he was editing for New Media Publications, COMICS FEATURE. Dean left to expand Eclipse Enterprises, the first major alternative comics company, after five issues, but I remained for another year as a contributor. It was for COMICS FEATURE that I did my first extended critical essays on comics and on animation, and for which I first interviewed comics professionals. Then one day in 1980 I was summoned to the Fantagraphics Manor in Connecticut, where I had my first real encounter with the notorious Gary G. Groth, who was impressed with my work for FEATURE and tried to interest me in editing what was to become AMAZING HEROES. I didn't accept that offer, but later I did agree to do THE X-MEN COMPANION books for them. I was intrigued with the idea of editing, writing, and doing interviews for an entire book (or, as it turned out, two books) about a major comics series. After work on the books began, Gary asked me to take over the animation column in the JOURNAL (which, alas, I have little time to write nowadays), and so I left New Media and began

*The Enchanted Drawing* (named after one of the very first animated films) there. I had also grown so fond of doing interviews that I began doing them regularly for *AMAZING HEROES*, reaching a peak of sorts with the large number I did for the 1984 Preview issue.

After completing a two-year term of teaching English at Columbia University, I began doing freelance work for DC. Marv Wolfman and Len Wein were planning to do a series covering the entire history of DC's fictional cosmos, which has since evolved into both the *DEFINITIVE DIRECTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE* and the *CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS* series. Marv and Len asked me to read through virtually the entire DC library--nearly fifty years' worth of stories--and take notes, and, though it took me three days a week for a year, I did it, and no, my mind did not turn to mush in the process. Some weeks were painful (like when I was reading 1950s *Blackhawk*-versus-space-monsters stories), but others were Everyfan's Dream, like when I was reading the complete run of *BATMAN* or Golden Age classics I had never dreamed I'd ever get to see. By the fall of that year, 1982, I had also begun work helping to research, proofread, and write *THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE* on Mark Gruenwald's invitation. (I am now working on the second edition of the Handbook.)

Then in late 1983 *X-MEN* editor Louise Jones announced her intention to transform herself into freelance writer Louise Simonson. Her assistant, Ann Nocenti, succeeded her as editor, and Ann, on the recommendation of Mark and others, asked me to become her assistant editor. After some agonizing, and finally realizing that this job would pay better and be more secure than teaching or working on my freelance assignments, I accepted. I've had this job for over half a year now, and yes, I'm pleased to be working on *THE X-MEN*, which is still the best superhero series now being published, in my opinion.

My Marvel commitments keep me so busy (Ms. Schutz is not far wrong when she comments that I Never Sleep) that I can no longer do as much writing for fanzines as I have in the past, but my work will continue to appear from time to time in *THE COMICS JOURNAL* and *AMAZING HEROES*. Since this issue of the *WIRE* is devoted to Fantagraphics, I should discuss what it has been like to be associated with this infamous organization of elitist aesthetes. After all, soon Fantagraphics will move to California, and the *WIRE* readers are no doubt anxious to know what to expect. Will Fantagraphics' arrival finally provoke the Almighty into destroying the state once and for all? Or will the new Fantagraphics Manor West become a respected California institution, on the order of, say, Knott's Berry Farm?

How do I begin to describe His Satanic Majesty, Gary G. Groth, guiding light of the Fantagraphics Empire? What can I say about a man who will phone me at 11 p.m. to do a bad impression of me (it makes me sound like my throat had turned into a cement mixer)? How can I communicate the essence of a man who keeps taking me to this Thai restaurant so he can enjoy seeing me gaze warily at food that hisses, steams, and seems at any moment about to erupt volcanically onto my face? You might say, "But Gary Groth can't possibly mean all those negative things he says about mainstream comics!" Oh, yes, he does.

Obviously, I don't agree with many of his opinions on comics, and I certainly don't share his taste for invective. But the important point is that he does not insist that I share either his opinions or his critical style. Groth and Kim Thompson appear to me to be primarily interested in procuring intelligently written and insightful pieces for their magazines, even if those pieces voice opinions other than their

own. *THE COMICS JOURNAL* remains by far the most literate of all periodicals about comics, and although we may disagree as to how to achieve this end, I find the *JOURNAL*'s critical insistence that American comics produce more sophisticated material highly commendable. Groth and Thompson have given me almost complete freedom in producing the kind of work I've done for them, for which they have my gratitude. Their magazines are so far the only vehicles I can see for the kind of interviews and articles I want to do.

A guiding principle behind my articles and interviews is that I want them to endure. An *AMAZING HEROES* interview serves to publicize a current comics series, but I try to do more in the interviews that I conduct for *AH*. I attempt to get my interview subjects to tell me why they are doing these projects, to give me a sense of what they are trying to express through their work, to tell me about the nuances they see in their characterizations, to explore their own themes, to give their opinions on the comics medium, and to give us a look at their personal artistic vision. I even try to capture a sense of what the interviewee is like through the way that he talks. It is my hope that not only do these interviews prove to be informative and enlightening now, but that people will be able to read them years from now and gain insight into what these comics creators were thinking when they were doing those particular series.

Since I started working for DC and Marvel two years ago, I have shifted my attention as a critic to animation. But whether we speak of my critical pieces on comics or on animation, my intent in the 1980s has been to act as a true critic, not as a reviewer. Most "critics" are really reviewers, doing little more than writing consumer guides, telling the reader whether something is worth buying or not. Strictly speaking, however, a critic is a writer who attempts to illuminate the meaning and workings of his subject. A critic should make his readers aware of aspects of a work that they may not have noticed, and thereby increase their appreciation of it. If the work falls short of success, then the critic should point to possible means by which it could have been improved. A critic is as much an explorer and investigator as he is a judge, and is a student as well as a teacher, learning from the masters even as he offers guidance to those he thinks he can help; he should be a guide rather than a prosecutor. At this point I prefer to uncover further depths of meaning in works of greatness; weeding out the bad material in whatever medium I review is a necessity, but I do it as a duty, not a pleasure. I would rather write about what I enjoy.

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So this is my story, that of a letterhacker who made it and became a Legend in His Own Time. (Just mention my name to any fan and he'll respond, "Who?") But the curse of being a Legend (or, as some would have it, a veritable Myth) is that there is always some young whippersnapper coming along out to make his or her reputation by displacing you from your pedestal. So it is that I now face a challenge from the editor of this magazine, Ms. Schutz (or Godiva Peachtree, or the Berkeley Bombshell, or whatever she is calling herself this week). Oh, I remember our first encounter at the 1982 San Diego Con (actually, I don't, but she's told me about it) in which she stood timidly and demurely by while I conversed with Cat Yronwode, understandably awed by Cat's and my greatness. But in the intervening years, Catherine and I have shifted our interests from fan writing to editorial work, and Ms. Schutz, seeing her opportunity, moved into the breach. Her fame has rapidly grown through her various activities: her editing *THE TELE-*

GRAPH WIRE; her interviews for other fanzines; her mysterious correspondence with Brad Strong and his innumerable relatives, the cabal that truly controls comics; her television appearance as Wonder Woman. Why, she even managed to crash a party held by the New Mutants. Now, as her hubris grows, she has even started a fan club devoted to herself, merchandising all manner of Diana Schutz Collectibles™. (Oh, she'll deny it, but we know the truth.) But even as she glories in her newly won fame, fear gnaws at her soul: what if the Masters should return to doing more frequent fanzine writing? She can keep a watchful eye on Cat, who lives out in California, but how can she monitor the activities of a New Yorker like myself? No, she realized, her only recourse for safeguarding her throne is to eliminate me.

So it is that she has challenged me to a duel of minds at this year's San Diego Con. I cannot reveal the exact nature of the conflict, but it bears a marked similarity to the mental duel between Reed Richards and Doctor Doom in FANTASTIC FOUR SPECIAL #2 to see who had the greater mind. We have vowed to match each other shot for shot, and we shall see who survives with fewer brain cells destroyed. But beware, Schutz: you face an opponent whose psychic strength is such that he has read virtually the entire DC and Marvel libraries without having his brain reduced to mush. So, readers, should you encounter poor Diana in the near future, her brain burnt out, babbling "Michael Jackson, I am your Wonder Woman!" take pity on her, for she has learned what happens when Titans Clash.

When titans clash, indeed! Readers, it is for your benefit that I have chosen to serve up these words from one of fandom's most respected writers--though by now, I suspect, he has been forced to carefully eat and digest each and every one of them! Except, perhaps, for that bit about a Diana Schutz Fan Club--kinda has a nice ring to it, don't ya think? In fact, in preparation for our "duel of minds" at this year's San Diego Con, Mr. Sanderson along with Steve Saffel, Marvel's assistant promotional director for direct sales, set about early on to undermine my editor's will by circulating an actual sign-up membership form for said fan club--complete with a glossy, full-colour membership card!

Of course, their ploy was foiled and ye editor escaped unscathed--though blushing furiously--but with a newly-found determination to emerge victorious. In attendance at this infamous Contest of Wills were Eclipse editors Dean Mullaney and Cat Yronwode, WIRE columnist Eric Yarber, and a motley Comics & Comix crew consisting of Carl Davidson, Ann Eagan, and Scott Maple. They will all vouch for the fact that, shot for shot, I fairly coasted along the sea of margaritas while poor Peter very nearly drowned. I have my witnesses, Sanderson! Ms. Yronwode comments that perhaps I had an unfair advantage since Peter's personality is located in his brain--tequila's prime target--while mine, she maintains, is located (rather curiously) in my elbows. Perhaps Mr. Sanderson will find it wise to relocate his personality to an altogether different spot when he learns what I have planned for Round II at San Diego Con '85!

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# ALL IN COLOR FOR A BUCK-&-A-HALF

## COLUMN OF CRITICISM & REVIEW

### ZOT! #5

Due perhaps to the cartoonish graphic style, this book seems to have gotten a reputation for being rather breezy and unpretentious. Reading this issue, I wonder how much this reputation is deserved. True, there is a long funny sequence in which an ape (really a young boy) chases an old woman (also a young boy) through a galactic museum full of strange beasts and obnoxious tourists, but this comes after writer/artist Scott McCloud has shown us a gentle reminder of the benefits of patriotism and contrasted it with a series of political intrigues that rather satirically point out the types of individuals who are responsible for the ills of more worlds than Sirius IV. After the museum scene, there is a rocket chase that is played perfectly straight and comes to a grim conclusion. And following that is a perfectly chilling final three pages.

I honestly can't think of another book being published today that tries for the range of moods that ZOT! does, let alone succeeds at as many of them as the book manages to. Highly recommended.

### CUTEY BUNNY #3

After reading this comic, I was immediately reminded of some proverb about watching pennies or pounds or not watching one or the other, or you can watch some of the pennies some of the time but you can't watch all of the pennies all of the time, or pounds, or something. I can't remember the proverb for the life of me, but this comic reminded me of it. I think CUTEY BUNNY must affect a lot of people that way.

There certainly are enough things to watch in this book. Writer/artist Joshua Quagmire has an engagingly busy style, panels seeming to fill up geometrically with throwaway gags and touches of expression. This is always handled cleanly and with a minimum of eyestrain for the reader. Special mention should be made of Quagmire's conception of the Loch Ness Monster, in which the artist manages the difficult task of making a character look ominous and silly at the same time. "Space Gophers Inc.," the back-up feature, is possibly even more visually active, with roughly fifteen characters interacting in a seven-page story!

The only difficulty I had with the book was the ending of the Cutey Bunny tale. Although the comic detail was excellent all the way to the conclusion of the story, the plot seemed to simply stop instead of coming to a climax and finishing things up. Quagmire has all his pennies in fine shape, and with a little work on the pounds in CUTEY BUNNY, this book

should be well-nigh irresistible.

### MR. X #1

I've always had a problem with superheroes in that they were always of the same general build, huge and correctly proportioned, while each villain was usually distorted or deformed in some new and interesting way. You can guess which guys I identified with as a child. I always suspected you could take the costume off one hero and put it on another without many people noticing the difference. Try that with the Mole Man and the Joker!

Or try it with Mr. X, for that matter. He's the nominal hero of a new book by the Hernandez brothers from Vortex Publications. If there's a villain more distorted or deformed than this hero, I'd greatly like to see that individual. The book opens with Mr. X crawling out of a sewer and ends with him falling off a rooftop. In between, he manages to cover about as much ground as these two extremes would suggest, creeping creepily through a strange futuristic city where people who look like models for gin advertisements laughingly watch video tapes of celebrity autopsies. Mr. X appears to be a trifle too loathsome for even their jaded appetites, however, and they spend a great deal of the book's time being alternately attracted and disgusted by this strange figure who is presumably on a mission of justice.

As you might imagine, it takes a rather perverse sense of humor to enjoy this book. Luckily, I estimate that 96% of the current population has such a perverse sense of humor, and those that don't may come along anyway for the attractive graphics which perfectly match the cryptic plotline. Unusual it is, but highly readable.

### SABRE #11

This is the second issue drawn by Jose Ortiz, and his artwork indeed makes a difference. Most of the exaggeration and stylization that Billy Graham brought to the book are still evident in Ortiz' version, but Ortiz has a solid foundation below his caricature-like art that Graham lacked. The book is much easier to follow due to these firmer visuals.

Sabre's motivations seem to be directed more toward his family than anything else, and that fact is made very clear in this issue, which consists mainly of non-physical confrontations at the rebel community where he and his wife and kids live. The closest equivalent this issue has to a fight scene is a two-page sequence of Sabre changing his children's diapers--which I found far more compelling than any punch-'em-out I've dragged through in recent memory.

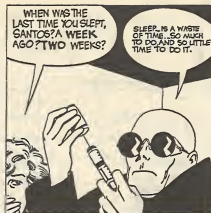




Sabre meets his match in his wife and children!



(C) McGregor and Ortiz



(C) Vortex Comics

Mr. X fixing to stay awake.

(After all, if Spider-Man were fighting Doctor Octopus, not much would surprise me unless the Web-slinger got urinated on, like Sabre.) The diaper scene is something I haven't seen much of in comics, even in comics about married heroes, and the entire long sequence featuring Sabre works quite well.

The only problem with this issue is the rather jarring way in which Don McGregor paces the sub-plots. After following Sabre around for two-thirds of the book and getting the reader used to a leisurely flow of storyline, the issue abruptly shifts to two-to-four page sub-plots taking place hundreds of miles apart. Supposedly this will all come together soon, but the sudden leaps after following one character for so long are a bit too opposite in form to fit together well. Other than that, I thoroughly enjoyed the book and hope that Sabre has a return match with the babies soon.

#### VANITY #1 and #2 and JERRY IGER'S FAMOUS FEATURES #1

This one I have to prepare for. Let me take off my coat, gulp down a couple of cups of coffee, bang my head against the refrigerator a few times...okay, I'm ready.

I have before me two different titles from Pacific Comics. One is VANITY, written and drawn by Will Meugnot; the other is JERRY IGER'S FAMOUS FEATURES, which reprints work drawn by Matt Baker in the 1940s. Reading these two titles back to back has been quite an experience for me, I can tell you.

Y'know, gang, sooner or later we all notice that there is something radically different between the bodies of men and those of women. At that point, it's up to each of us whether to be mature and take it in stride or have fun. Even if you never do anything about it, it's really kind of nice and special just to realize that there is a difference out there. There's nothing wrong with spending your whole life a little excited about it, as long as you're aware of



(C) Will Meugnot

Vanity and her lilac bush

why things like the Iger book are healthier than something like VANITY.

Although Matt Baker's artwork for IGER'S "Flamingo" is definitely cheesecake, the character of Flamingo is always presented as an attractive, graceful figure. She's meant to entice the reader, certainly, but there's nothing cruel or humiliating toward her in the way this is done.

On the other hand, if the backgrounds of VANITY were removed, we would see nothing but the title character in one pose of sexual submission after another. Not physical love between two equals, I must make clear, but a union in which the female party is dominated mentally or physically or both by an unseen male. This is not sexy. Nauseating, yes. Ludicrous, perhaps. (Vanity's regular standing posture of leaning slightly forward so that her rear end sticks way out reminds me of nothing so much as Howard the Duck!)

In what may be an attempt to be fair to both sexes, VANITY also contains a character named Ma'n'an, who seemingly exists only to show the reader that men can be mindless sexual objects as well. Pulling down men to put them on the same degraded level as a woman like Vanity is not fair, of course. It only compounds the basic misconceptions behind the characters in this series.

People should be excited about the difference between the sexes, but never out of some desire to dominate another human being. The romantic approach behind Flamingo, that of a beautiful, idealized woman, is basically a healthy one that implies a basic respect that men should show toward anyone who is bright and alive. VANITY all too often displays the unsettling attitude of someone who would want to pull the clothing off a woman in the street simply to show her that she's not such hot stuff. Hopefully, JERRY IGER'S will attract the larger audience if only because the writing and artwork are far superior to VANITY regardless of any other motivations.

(I should mention, in all fairness, that men and women are presented as equals in VANITY's back-up strip, "Avalone". Both sexes have an equal shot to get their faces ripped off by big glowing bugs!)

-- Eric Yarber

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The sensuous fantasy women who populate the world inside Boris Vallejo's paintings are legendary. They seem to gently sway with the pulse of life, so realistically rendered. There is a dangerous side to their beauty as well, all blended as skillfully as the color and light from which they've emerged.

However, this suite of illustrations is not bound together with women as a theme, as was *Boris' Beauties*. We felt,

as did Boris, that it was more important to display the artist's *most recent work*, which encompasses a wide range of fantastic imagery. Several of the paintings will be seen for the very first time in this special limited-edition for collectors.

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